PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments upon the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians: Genesis, chapter 30th.

COURTING, SWINDLING, AND WRESTLING.

THE twenty-ninth chapter of this book, is taken up with a long story about Jacob's courtships, contracts and intrigues with his two cousins, Rachel and Leah; daughters of his uncle Laban. The story is trifling, destitute of all the features of interesting facts, and wholly unworthy of the dignified appellation of holy writ. The thirtieth chapter is still worse; it contains an account of the conjuring manner, in which Jacob swindled his uncle Laban, out of his flocks and herds, and then gave him leg bail for security; the story is not remarkable for delicacy or even decency; it is a ring-streaked and speckled revelation, as may be seen by reading the thirty-seventh, thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth verses, It would be well for the learned believers in christianity, to peruse with attention the thirtieth chapter of Genesis, and then show us if they can, the divinity of such an indelicate piece of conjuration; such gross impositions upon credulity, are really to be deplored, and the more so, as they tend to corrupt the purity of youthful ideas, upon the important principles of decency and Philosophy: in the thirty second chapter, we have an account of the athletic exploits of Jacob and Jehovah, in which, however, Jacob comes off second best, and no wonder for the match was not equal. In verse twenty fourth it is said, and Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. In the caption of this chapter, it is said that Jacob wrestled with an angel; here it is said to be a man, and in the final issue of the business, it appears to be

God himself; for he says in verse thirtieth, for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved, but whether it was God, an angel, or a man is not material, for the story carries on the face of it, the marks of fiction and not revelation. We must seek for the mind and will of God in other sources; we must read it in a book of a very different character, than that of the Bible; that book is the volume of nature, reader peruse it and thou wilt be instructed; it contains the science of life, and directs us in the path of substantial happiness.

LAWS OF NATURE.

It is by long observation, that man discovers the true character of the laws, by which the world is governed, the united experience of nations and ages bears such ample testimony, to a general, universal and immutable establishment, that doubts in the present case, seem tantamount to a wilful attack upon that mass of evidence, which is calculated to work general conviction in the human mind; where Phenomena are constant and uniform, they ought most undoubtedly to become the basis of the highest confidence. If it were possible for a single individual, to possess all the rational powers, with a knowledge of one solitary fact, that the sun has risen in the Eastern hemisphere, he could not affirm that there existed a certainty of his ever beholding the same phenomenon again; from a single case, no general deduction can be drawn, but from thousands and thousands of cases, conclusions may be made against, which nothing but folly and fanaticism could be induced to make any opposition. When the Bible asserts that the sun stood still, or that the regular operations of the laws of nature were suspended in the planetary system, the universal observation of mankind, the experience and the testimony of ages are against the assertion; to say that it is a lie, is perfectly consistent with all those rules of judging, by which the reason of man ought to be regulated; nay further, in all other cases where religion is not concerned, men of common understanding would be ashamed to acquiese in decisions of a similar nature. When the New Testament affirms that Jesus turned water into wine, we know or ought to know, that the assertion is false; first because the practicability or possibility of such a thing is denounced by the nature of the case,—by the reason and experience of mankind; secondly, because the

science which man has acquired, has exposed innumerable impostures of this kind, and so many detections have thrown a coloring of suspicion over all the rest. Credulity however, and especially religious credulity, seems to be a leading property to which the imbecility of man has exposed his existence. In proportion as the human mind becomes improved and enlightened, it becomes less credulous, less disposed to swallow absurd and marvellous doctrines. The sublime and elevated power of contemplation excludes all credulity, and surveys with steadiness, the character of different beings or objects; it enquires with patient perseverance, and never suffers itself to be thrown off from that well balanced position, which takes in all the points and bearings of any given portion of Physical existence. Intellectual precipitancy leadeth to error; it is the character of the mind in search of truth, to move in an easy and happy medium of doubt,—always disposed to be influenced by the greatest quantity of evidence which the nature of the case presents to view, when a man in a state of intellectual fanity reads in *holy writ*, the story of Jonah and the whale, or in other words the big fish; it is scarcely possible to refrain from a burst of laughter. If religious superstition were not blinded by the inherent nature of her own character, she would be ashamed of the gross attempts to impose upon men, such miraculous tales for a system of truth and genuine theology; but nothing will tend to destroy superstition, more than a persevering attention to the laws of nature; no man who understands these laws, and who perspicuously surveys the immutable properties which they possess, can possibly believe in the hob-goblin stories of antiquity. It may be objected here that Newton was a good philosopher;—that he understood well the laws of nature, and yet, that he was a believer in the christian religion; in the first place, it is uncertain in what respects he was a believer, or how far in his own mind he might have rejected certain absurd and ridiculous parts of the Old and New Testament: It is well known, that he did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, and his knowledge of the solar system, must have elevated him above any kind of credence in the following declaration in *holy writ*, *Sun stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou moon in the valley of Agalon*; but if we concede what has generally been considered as a fact, that he was a christian upon a graduated scale, it will prove nothing in the present case. A correct knowledge of the laws of nature, includes something more than mere mathematical calculation, or demonstration; it includes something more than planetary revolutions, eccentricity of comets

or magnitude of celestial bodies; that important and useful science, which embraces all the operations of the human mind, and on which in fact the welfare of the intelligent world depends, was not well understood by Newton; he understood physical nature, but with the moral science he was much less conversant; he had not compared the operations of the understanding, with the doctrines and opinions contained in the Bible. From such a comparison made without prejudice, deductions must have followed hostile to the sentiments of the church, and to that system of religion, from which the church has drawn its tenets; these tenets must eventually give way to a thorough knowledge of moral and physical existence.

FOR THE PROSPECT.

It would be difficult to determine whether folly or baseness, was the most prominent characteristic of the authors of the christian religion. Their object seems to have been, to impose upon the credulity of mankind, and propagate a religion as divine, which they must have known to be false; but they appear at the same time, to have been destitute of the talents necessary to the judicious performance of so difficult a piece of business. They were astonishingly successful it is true, but their success was among the unthinking class of people, who did not examine the merits of the system, or take reason as the criterion of their decision. If they had, they would never have adopted a religion so pregnant with absurdity, as that which was published by the Apostles of the carpenter Jesus.

Matthew, one of the most important organs of this religion, has undertaken in the first chapter of his book, to prove that Jesus had lineally decended from David, for which purpose he has given the geneology from David, down to Joseph his mother's husband; but he informs us in the next paragraph, that Jesus was not a descendant from the said Joseph, but was begotten by a ghost: this is proving him to be a descendant from David with a witness. It would be impossible at this day, to find a school boy of ten years old, capable of committing so gross a blunder in telling a story, as the divinely inspired Matthew has done in this case; had he been a man possessed of the least spark of common sense, he would not in his attempt to deceive the world, have told a story so inconsistent

with itself, and have contradicted his own statement of the business, in so barefaced a manner. The impostor Mahomet executed his scheme of deception in a much better manner; In his plan, we may discover some method and arrangement, and a great deal of deep cunning, but christianity is destitute of all these qualities.

In Matthew chap. 13, ver. 55, Jesus is called "the carpenter's son," and in Mark chap. 6, ver. 3, he is called "the carpenter," so that it seems he was both a carpenter and a carpenter's son, and it would have been much better for the world, and perhaps for himself too, if he had pursued this useful occupation, instead of strolling about the country with a set of vagabond women, such as Mary Magdalene and the rest, imposing upon the credulity of the ignorant multitude, and making converts from among the very scum of the populace. Both those writers speak of his brethren, James, Joses, Juda, and Simon, and in John chap. 7, these brethren are represented as mocking him, and endeavouring to turn him into ridicule: "For (says the writer ver. 5,) neither did his brethren believe in him." It is really astonishing, that mankind in this enlightened age, should believe a man who lived 1800 years ago, to have been the son of God, and the saviour of the world, whom his own brothers (the sons of the same mother at least,) who lived with him, and saw all his performances, believed to be an impostor. What a misfortune it is to be educated in the school of superstition: How soon will mankind open their eyes, and see their own folly: If those who deny the divinity of Christ at this day, are to suffer eternal punishment for so doing, what punishment ought to be inflicted on his brothers, who were connected with him by all the tender ties of nature, and saw all the miracles he performed, but still disbelieved in his divinity, and laughed at him as a cowardly imposter. If John had been a man of any discernment, he would have kept this circumstance to himself, and not have divulged a secret so essentially derogatory to the character of this impostor, whose cause he intended to defend.

Juvenis.

PROPHECIES &c.

WHEREFORE should the word of God be harder to understand than the word of man? Why should that be mysterious, which is most necessary to be plain? Why should not

God's word be understood in its natural sense? How is revelation unrevealed consistent with divine wisdom or goodness, or the marks of evidence of either? Does God delight to puzzle and destract human minds; and purposely, as by a wile, to deceive men's understandings? Is this consistent with the character of goodness and truth? To what purpose are unknowable riddles, or inexplicable predictions? What knowledge does this convey? Or what warning do they give us of things to come, if the meaning of the expression is not known? And what occasion is there for such prophecies? If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle? So except words are uttered easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? If no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation, it can have no mystical meaning. They that say one thing, and mean another, are not to be depended on, nor regarded. Is it any mark of wisdom in a teacher to utter himself in words, which the scholar with all his endeavours cannot understand: And if he by labour or chance hopes he has got the right sense, yet can never be sure of it? That which is good and wise need not be ashamed nor afraid to appear. The wisdom that is hidden, has not the face of wisdom; her residence is founded on knowledge; but mystery or secrecy prevents our coming at it. How is it consistent with the wisdom of God to deliver mysteries to the world, for men to explain as they can or will, leaving them in the dark to be eternally tossed about by their own giddy conceits, and his word to be to them an endless fund of deception, and maze of confusion, as well as an everlasting bone of contention? Where is the difference between what is unintelligible and nonsense? When mysteries prevail, credulity is infatuation. Any writing may be deemed prophetic, if a mystical interpretation be allowed. Whatever the spirit teaches, the letter says, the time will come when men will turn their ears from truth, and be turned into fables. To put a spiritual or mystical interpretation to a prophecy, is to make a fable of it. Are not assertions and prevarications ever present where truth is present?—It seems so strange, that the Jews should not know the meaning of their own Prophets, and we should; as that a Foreigner in tongue and religion, should understand the articles of our church, and our churchmen not understand them at all; and yet the strangers sense of these articles should be forced, foreign and allegorical. I (as a carnal man) am apt to think the knack of understanding the prophecies and scriptures, spiritually, is that of parting what sense men please upon them, to preserve their reputation: So

if they can be fulfilled or understood in any sense, the prophets and writers keep their characters at the expence of God's, who by this means is represented prevaricating with mankind, by saying one thing, and meaning a different; or giving out his oracles in such dark enigma's, that neither Speakers nor hearers know what is meant, nor have any certain rule to direct them what is their proper meaning. To all rational minds it is apparent, that they who go beyond things natural and moral, go beyond their senses. This spiritual sense, which is above the capacity of the natural man, is the all confounding sense of nature. The reasonable relish of things, spoils an enthusiastical appetite.

If we consider the nature of such prophecy, as requires a spiritual or mystical interpretation, we shall find, that were the prophets honest men, they did not understand what they themselves meant; for they that are honest, will not speak so as to mislead and deceive their hearers. If they were not honest, they spoke one thing and meant another, whereby they that believed in them were deceived, and punished for being deceived; that is, for their faith and sincerity. So the Jews were deceived by their own Prophets? None could be more than they. They thought that believing their Prophets was faith in God; and this faith deceived them, and they are cast off for being deceived! Unhappy people! to be so made by their faith, by which they hope to be saved, as well as we! We plainly read, that the Prophets promised these people to send them a prince, who should deliver them out of the power of all their enemies, and make them everlastingly happy; no prophecy is more plain. The Jews believed that these Prophets were directed by God thus to speak; and they are deceived by thus believing in God: They could understand these prophecies no otherwise, than according to the obvious and natural sense of the words delivered. If they had put a different sense upon them, it would have been easily proved they had been to blame; but because they understood and believed as they thought in God by his Prophets, in the most apparent sense, he, as we may say, has forsaken them! This is a miserable reflection! If they are wrong in so believing, their Prophets were wrong in so deceiving them. If we ascribe it to God, it is fathering the deception and the design on him. Words that cannot be understood, are spoken to no purpose; they contain no revelation or prophecy: Or if there is any design or purpose by such utterance, it is a very deceitful one.

A.

BIBLE PROPHETS, &c.

WHAT confidence or trust ought to be reposed in the prophecies, will the more plainly appear, as the enquiry is the more soberly, or diligently made. By the understanding and conduct of the Prophets, the foundation of men's faith in them may be known.

The writer of the pentateuch tells us, that God bade Jacob go down into Egypt, and promised that he would certainly bring him up again; but he never returned again alive.

Elisha sent Hazael to Benhadad, with a lie in his mouth. Say unto him, (said the Prophet) thou may'st certainly recover, but he died; and to make the Prophet more knowing than honest, he is said to foreknow his death, and that Hazael would take that opportunity to make himself King: And it is suspicious, that he as well had, as followed, the Prophet's advice, for his own advantage in deceiving Benhadad.

Huldah promised king Josiah in the word of the Lord, that he should die in peace; yet he died in war. Perhaps his faith in the Prophetess made him fool-hardy, which shews us the folly of confiding in prophecies.

When Hezekiah was sick, Isaiah told him, that he should surely die, and not live; but Hezekiah telling the Lord how good he had been, he so wrought upon the Lord, that he promised him, by Isaiah, fifteen years longer life; therefore it was not Hezekiah, but the Lord that repented: and how can future events be foretold, when it may chance the Lord himself may change his mind. A.

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